

Ionla Barn
Trevilians vicinity
Louisa County
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1000

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

IONIA, BARN

HABS No. VA-1000

Location: Trevilians vicinity, Louisa County, Virginia

Present Owner: Messrs. P.B. Hanger and J.N. Hanger

Present Use: Hay storage barn and shelter for cattle

Significance: This late 18th-century barn of heavy-timber construction is one of the oldest in Virginia. It is an excellent example of an English barn design adapted to the New World landscape. Of special note are structural details and original hardware.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Major James "Wheat Stacks" Watson, son of James Watson (an indentured servant who arrived from Scotland in 1717), was the original builder and owner of Ionia. He purchased the land soon after his marriage in January 1773, and began to raise wheat. It is assumed that it was during these first years of the farm's existence that the barn was built. Unfortunately, there are no records to substantiate this assumption. The earliest record of the barn is in 1802, when it is accounted for in an insurance policy inventory.

On August 11, 1828, Major Watson willed to his son, George, that part of his estate which included the house and all the outbuildings; the rest he gave to his second son, David.

Ionia then passed on to Dr. George Watson's wife, Ann, following his death in 1854. By 1879, the taxes had become so great that she decided to divide the property among her seven children. Her daughter, Mrs. C.H. Barbour, received the portion that included the house and

other structures. On February 23, 1894, Ionia was sold to Thomas Barbour for one dollar.

In 1909 Thomas Barbour then sold the farm to J. H. Diggs for \$4,000. Five years later, C. F. Ettla purchased the property, and on February 12, 1915, Ionia was passed onto W. W. Smith for "one dollar and the payment of a deed of trust debt of three thousand dollars". In five months time, J. N. Hanger bought the farm for \$1,067.41 and the \$3,000 debt; it is now owned, sixty years later, by his sons, Pallison and John.

2. Date of Erection: possibly between 1775 and 1780
3. Alterations and additions: A wooden shed was added quite early to the southern end of the barn, possibly for additional grain storage space. A much later addition was built onto the northern end in the early 1940's by the Hangers for the purpose of equipping the barn with a hay lift track and pulley system. At this time, they also removed two ceiling beams to allow the hay to pile more easily on the barn floor, as well as taking the weatherboarding down from the entire northern side to lengthen the interior space an additional sixteen feet. The large center post has been replaced with a much smaller timber, which lacks the craftsmanship and beauty of the former. And all but one side of the 3½' high grain walls on the interior have been since removed.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure

The original use of this particular barn is unclear. It is very possible that the barn was, in fact, used as a mill (i.e., in conjunction with an oxen- or horse-powered tread mill) to grind the large amounts of wheat that "Wheat Stacks" Watson harvested each year. Watson mentioned several times in his will of 1828 "the mill" which he lent to his wife, Ann, until her death. David Watson, in his Farm Diary, also writes of a mill on his father's estate when he entered, on August 18, 1806:

"Showery all the morning... my father's mill grinding. A fine day after the rain."

And on September 18, 1810, he wrote:

"Began to tread wheat yesterday. Warmer and some showers of rain about; just enough here yesterday evening to stop our wheat treading."

However, the insurance policies of 1802, 1805, and 1815 listed with the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, do not specify a mill as a separate building, but only a barn "30 feet square one story high". This supports the conjecture that the barn was actually used for storage of the treaded (or untreaded) wheat instead of as the shelter or structure for a mill. A grindstone, which is believed to have been the one for the tread mill, was found underneath the dwelling house by the Hangers several years ago.

C. Sources

1. Bibliography:

Arthur, Eric, and Whitney, Dudley, The Barn, New York Graphic, New York, 1972.

Deed Books: 13, p. 573; 27, pp. 539-40; 33, pp. 10-12; 34, pp. 148-49, 171-72, County Clerk, Louisa County, Va.

Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, Policies for 1802, 1805, and 1815.

Sloan, Eric, An Age of Barns, Ballantine Books, New York, 1967.

Watson, David, "Farm Diary of David Watson, 1824-1830".

Will Books: 2, p. 259; 7, p. 477, County Clerk, Louisa County, Virginia.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The plan of the original 30' by 30' barn structure is very similar to that of the simple English barn. The differences lie in the less distinct mow and bay areas of the Ionia barn, due to the absence of the large swing beam.
2. Condition of fabric: The structural framing of the barn is in very good condition. The east and west façades' weatherboarding, however, is in very poor condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The original barn structure is square, thirty feet on a side. The height of the barn to its ridge line, is also thirty feet, with a slope of approximately 45° .
2. Foundations: Brick
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Beaded weather-board, unpainted and exposed.
4. Structural system, framing: Heavy, single-span timbers as sill plates, overlap at corner posts and interconnect stud walls, rafters, and beams. Rafters meet at the apex with no ridge board present- this absence marks an early date of construction. Floor joists span half the width, keyed into a single-length center beam running N-S. Diagonal bracing further strengthens the structure.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The two large door openings in the east and west walls are directly opposite each other for maximum ventilation. Each opening has two doors made of wooden planks attached to the barn by iron hinges.
 - b. Windows: Only two windows remain due to the removal of the north siding. Each window has a wooden door that swings to the exterior on iron hinges. There are also three window openings for the brick cellar, two of which had, at one time, square, wooden bars stretching vertically across the space.
6. Roof: Shape, Covering, Materials: A gable roof, originally sheathed with wooden shingles, but now covered with metal sheeting.

C. Description of Interior

1. Basement (cellar): Dirt floor; the brick foundation serves as the walls with a large, ground-to-ceiling opening on the east. Access is through this opening or else from above through a hole in the flooring that was cut after the barn was built.

First Floor: The barn is basically one large, open space with a 'ceiling' implied by the beams overhead.

Loft: Non-existent at present, but holes found in the upper surface of the beams suggest a flooring at one time. This area would serve well as extra storage space.

2. Flooring: Large, 1 5/4" thick planks extend N-S in two sections (15 feet each) across the floor joists underneath. Wooden pegs, 1/2" in diameter, secure the planks to each joist.
3. Hardware: Iron hinges are used for all window and door opening doors. The H-L hinges on the eastern doors are of particular interest because of their rarity. (see photos) An iron latch closes the front (western) doors, but it does not appear to be original.

D. Site

1. General Setting and Orientation: The original 30' by 30' barn was set into a hill, sloping naturally towards Hudson Creek to the east 100 yards away. The slope allows for a ground-level front entrance on the west, as well as a necessary floor-level access into the cellar from the east. The barn itself is a good distance from the rest of the farm buildings, affording it a more central location with the fields and grazing areas. A small pond that drains into the creek below was built in the hollow that separates the barn from the dwelling house and dependencies. (Please refer to the Site Plan on the Title Sheet of the drawings.)

Part III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by an undergraduate student in the School of Architecture, University of Virginia.

Course: Vernacular Architecture, Spring 1975

Professor: K. Edward Lay

Student: Karen Renick

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